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The People's Liberation Army is in the midst of a reform effort affecting its leadership, organization, recruitment and manpower, and military doctrine and education. Military reform has always been a controversial issue in China, and Deng Xiaoping has been trying to implement some of the current reforms for more than a decade. Nevertheless, there are signs now that real progress is being made and that the PLA of the 1990s will be leaner, better equipped, better trained, and better led than at any time since the revolution.

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Those who have stepped aside include most of the deputy chiefs of the general staff, most of the deputy directors of the general political and logistics departments, the air force commander, and all but three of the military region commanders. According to Chief of Staff Yang Dezhi, the number of leading members of the three general departments has been reduced by almost one-fourth, and the number of military region leaders by half.

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M. Z. HANMAN
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So far, however, the retirements have not reached the top command, the leadership of the Military Commission; Deng apparently plans to retain his Chief of Staff, Minister of Defense, and a few other key officials until their successors are fully ready to take charge. When the top leaders retire, Deng may again try to hand over his position to party boss Hu Yaobang.

Organization

Deng has also sought to reorganize the excessively decentralized and uncoordinated PLA by consolidating the previous 11 military regions into 7, establishing combined arms units, and creating a new system of reserve forces. Under the old regional arrangement, regional commanders apparently had considerable autonomy but often were bypassed through direct contact between the central command and divisions in the field. The intention of the consolidation--and the removal of most of the old commanders--may be to establish a tighter system of command and control over the PLA reaching from the center to the regions and beyond.

Efforts to create combined arms units and reserve forces are still in their early stages. Combined arms deployments require not only changes in command patterns but extensive officer education and training and procurement of needed equipment. Similarly, creation of reserve forces calls for the establishment of a reserve officer corps, a system of troop recruitment and organization, a support and training system, and a mechanism for coordinating with regular forces. At the same time, non-military or quasi-military functions have been hived off from the PLA, including the People's Armed Police, the railway construction corps, and frontier guard forces.

Recruitment and Manpower

The PLA has announced plans for a massive demobilization over the next two years involving about one-fourth of its strength, or some 1 million men. The plans apparently involve not only the overstaffed ground forces but the air force and navy as well, with cuts likely to be concentrated in staff and support troops rather than technical or combat forces. Some combat divisions, however, may also be affected.

Recruitment patterns are also changing as the PLA seeks to enlist more urban youths with middle-school or college education or technical training. Some of the PLA reduction in force is apparently to be accomplished by lowering recruitment goals, but such a massive RIF will also call for releasing a large number of relatively poorly educated and ill-trained enlisted troops onto an already overcrowded labor market. This is creating tension in a number of localities.

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Officer Education/Training

Despite the reestablishment over the last few years of more than 100 military academies and schools, education and training for PLA officers remains inadequate, according to Chief of Staff Yang Dezhi. Speaking recently to the graduating class at a Beijing military academy, Yang called for greater attention to curricula, school management, and teaching methods and greater respect for knowledge, talent, and education within the PLA. One step to upgrade training for senior officers may be the rumored establishment of a National Defense University to be headed by former Shenyang Military Region Commander and Politburo member Li Desheng.

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(U) CHINESE MILITARY REORGANIZATION



Summary

The People's Liberation Army is in the midst of a reform effort affecting its leadership, organization, recruitment and manpower, and military doctrine and education. Military reform has always been a controversial issue in China, and Deng Xiaoping has been trying to implement some of the current reforms for more than a decade. Nevertheless, there are signs now that real progress is being made and that the PLA of the 1990s will be leaner, better equipped, better trained, and better led than at any time since the revolution.

Leadership

One of Deng's main goals over the last several years has been to convince the PLA's aging officer corps to step aside and make way for younger, more professional officers. Until recently, progress in this effort was not impressive. During the last few months, however, several dozen top officers at the center and an even larger number in the military regions have retired and been replaced by the kind of officers Deng feels can lead the PLA into the era of modern warfare.

Those who have stepped aside include most of the deputy chiefs of the general staff, most of the deputy directors of the general political and logistics departments, the air force commander, and all but three of the military region commanders.

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